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RURAL CONVENIENCES

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For many years a serious problem, receiving the consideration of the student of rural problems was the drift from country to city and the causes which underlay it. Gradually conditions are changing and there is a decided movement toward the country. Careful analysis of the situation suggests that a large factor in the changed condition and increased interest in country life is the development of rural conveniences which make country living more enjoyable, not to emphasize their importance as commercial factors. The perfection and wide introduction of the telephone, rural delivery and interurban electric railway are revolutionizing the sentiment in many communities and are making marked changes in every community where they have been introduced.

From a business standpoint it is almost impossible to estimate the financial results accruing by reason of telephone communications. To call a neighbor and ask for the exchange of labor on certain work, as threshing, haying, etc., is only the work of a moment. To have a definite answer immediately is often worth much. To be able to 'phone the village storekeeper, who runs a country delivery and ask that supplies be sent out is a great convenience to the housewife. To 'phone the implement dealer and learn whether he has needed repairs in stock and, if so, to have them sent out on the next trolley car, if not to ask him to telegraph the factory to forward them immediately by express, is a saving in time that often amounts to a large saving when the planting or harvesting of crops is delayed because of needed repairs.

Unwritten history is replete with instances of farm homes which have been saved from destruction by fire because of prompt help secured by word over the telephone; that valuable animals have been saved through the early arrival of the veterinarian who was summoned by 'phone is another illustration of the telephone's usefulness. Many an itinerant sharper's plans for making "easy money" in a community have been frustrated because his first caller, after learning that he was trying to drive a sharp bargain

'phoned the next neighbor who, thus put on guard, did not become a victim. The sharper in disgust turns to other fields where there are no telephones over which to notify his prospective victims of his game.

Business appointments, social appointments, discussions of social and church plans, to say nothing of the mere friendly exchange of greeting over the telephone have probably compensated every owner of a rural telephone many times over for the expense of it if all business advantages were ignored.

In spite of the fact that on some rural lines there are from three to twenty 'phones, many of which are called into play in response to a summons which only demands one answer, the subscriber would not be without its convenience because of its lack of privacy. At some seasons of the year the general summons to the 'phone gives notice that central is ready to report the weather bureau's prognostication for the following day. When haying and harvest or late seeding are in progress the notice of a probable change in the weather may mean the saving of part or all of a crop that would otherwise have been lost.

The rural delivery of mail has stimulated correspondence between friends and family. The certainty that the letter if written will reach the postoffice at the latest within twenty-four hours and that the answer will be delivered to the door even though every member of the family is too busy to go to the postoffice, makes for a sense of nearness which can hardly be realized unless one has experienced the sense of isolation when six or seven miles from the postoffice and "too busy to go for the mail." The business advantage resulting from a quick communication with the merchant and factory is again a factor the value of which statistics do not report. To know that the letter mailed to-day will reach its destination on the morrow in time for necessary repairs to be shipped on the night express is an economic advantage which is having a desirable influence. The increase in the circulation of city dailies, agricultural weeklies and innumerable monthly magazines, social, religious and literary, has been very great. In no place is the truth of the saying "that the more one has the more one wants" greater than in the increasing use of reading matter because of rural delivery.

The regularity of market reports with its resulting closer understanding of market conditions and better judgment as to when

to sell are only incidents of the conveniences that rural mail service affords. This usefulness will be added to immeasurably when the nation inauguates a parcel post that will make possible the quick exchange of moderate sized packages between country and city at a moderate cost and with the promptness now possible in the exchange of written communications.

The interurban car line connecting the country and the town has both a commercial and a social influence in a community. To know that one has only to dress and "be ready for the 7.05 car" in order to attend a social function, a church gathering, an instructive lecture or an evening entertainment or other recreation and finish in time to catch the last car for home is conducive to rural contentment. To be free from the necessity of hitching up the horse by the light of a lantern before one dresses for the evening function; to know that one enters a social circle with the atmosphere of the house rather than of the stable; to know that after the evening pleasure is over horse and rig will not have to be cared for, and to know that a spirited horse is not standing out exposed to weather, even with a blanket on, while his owner listens to the lecture increases very materially the attractiveness of the evening diversion. This is especially true if in weighing the attractions and disadvantages early rising on the morrow is one of the drawbacks to the evening's social or educational event.

The money value of the trolley car passing the farm door on which supplies and repairs may be shipped in response to a telephone call is difficult to estimate; not only is the service of a messenger saved to the farm work, but with the aid of the telephone the needed article is often on the way to the farm before the messenger could have been ready to start for town.

Increasingly, the interurban car is becoming a systematic means of marketing products. Hundreds of thousands of gallons of milk, cream and packages of butter are regularly shipped from the farm gate to the city distributor or consumer. Market garden products, live and dressed poultry, eggs, dressed pork and mutton are all handled on many interurban lines. In some fruit sections four and five cars may be seen standing on the siding being loaded with fruit at a station where there is not a farm building in sight. Seven o'clock the following morning will find these products in the great markets of the city, fifty, sixty or even a hundred miles away.

When car load shipments justify it the private siding for loading of hay, grain and other bulky crops may be secured at the individual farm.

The delivery of morning and evening papers in a territory not supplied by rural mail is often accomplished by means of the interurban car.

The automobile, by some considered a luxury, is in many sections rapidly becoming an economic factor of no small importance. The actual time saved in the delivery of milk and cream to the creamery or shipping station or the delivery of other perishable farm products; the quick securing of repairs; the rapid movement of farm labor from one job to another; the reduced time necessary to be absent from the farm work in order to transact business in town and get back are matters of vital importance, independent of any sentiment. The pleasure and contentment of the family which the automobile makes possible because of the evening automobile ride for diversion or the exchange of social courtesies and the attendance upon meetings of various kinds is not to be overlooked. The great distance that may be covered, at the same time the fact that the evening pleasure with the automobile does not lessen the efficiency of the farm motive power on the following day, as is the case when the farm team must be hitched into the pleasure vehicle, is a factor which the student of farm conditions should not overlook. From a half to an hour's distance from railroad, church and social activities is the maximum desirable limit for a farm home. With the ordinary team and conveyances this restricts the distance to not over six or seven miles. With the automobile this may be increased to from nine to twelve miles and yet the farmer will feel nearer to town and his neighbors because of his automobile than he did with his horse-drawn vehicle.

The perfection and reliability of the automobile is rapidly introducing into the rural life problem a new factor in the personnel of the city business man who finds that the thirty to fifty minutes trip from home to office daily will, when taken in his automobile, permit him to live in the country where his children may have country air and freedom, and where he can forget city business problems in an effort to develop plant and animal life, whether it takes the form of generous lawns and gardens or a systematic farm business.

The influence of this transplanted city dweller on the social life, the labor problem and the farm practice of his new environment are subjects for study which the automobile and the interurban electric car have largely made possible. Probably no one factor has been a greater stimulus to the development of country roads with their economic importance in the movement of farm products aside from pleasure than has the rural and city-owned automobile.

Aside from questions of relative remuneration, social intercourse and educational opportunities, it is the conveniences made possible by the telephone, rural mail deliveries, interurban car line and automobile that are the greatest factors in the rapidly changing rural and urban sentiment toward farm life, and are hastening the day when the successful farmer will be recognized as of the true aristocracy of the nation.